



LED BY



Cacao of Excellence Awards

2027 Edition

Guide for participation

Version 10 June 2026



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This Guide provides detail on how the Cacao of Excellence Awards work and how cacao producers can participate. For more information, please visit: www.cacaoofoxcellence.org

1 Background on the Cacao of Excellence Awards

1.1 About Cacao of Excellence

Since 2009, the Cacao of Excellence Programme has been the entry point for cacao producers to participate in the Cacao of Excellence Awards, the renowned and only global competition that recognises the work and expertise of cacao farmers and celebrates the quality and flavour diversity of cacao produced around the world. Held every two years, the Cacao of Excellence Awards bring together leading sensory evaluation experts and the chocolate industry to reward producers of excellence.

The competition has spurred the participation of over 55 participating cacao-producing origins, the establishment of National Organisation Committees in 45 origins, dedicated national cacao quality competitions in over 25 origins, more than 1,250 superior quality cacaos that have been carefully selected and rigorously analysed, and over 400 cacao samples that have been awarded Cacao of Excellence Best 50, representing thousands of producers, families and communities.

The Programme has undergone a transformative journey, owing in part to the growth and popularity of the Awards competition. The Cacao of Excellence programme of the [Alliance of Bioversity and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture](#) works across five strategic priority areas to drive the expansion of superior quality cacao to ensure that a greater share of cacao producers prosper.

Cacao of Excellence is:



A renowned global cacao award competition – discovering, rewarding and championing cacao producers of excellence



A connector – offering a neutral platform convening the national and international public and private sector with data-driven solutions and international standards to build capacity at origin



A driver of cacao innovation – leading research on data-driven innovations laying the foundation for evidence-based knowledge to catalyse investment in developing cacao quality and diversity across origins



A hub for learning – building on 14+ years of experience supporting capacity building and cacao innovation in a newly established cacao research and development Laboratory and Training Centre



A protector of cacao genetic resources – safeguarding cacao genetic diversity to ensure long-term health, resilience, quality and diversity of planting materials



Our **VISION** is to catalyse the expansion of the superior quality cacao market segment to improve producer livelihoods and preserve biodiversity.

Our **OBJECTIVES** are to:

1. Increase awareness and promote education across the cacao value chain on opportunities to produce superior quality cacao and preserve flavours resulting from genetic diversity, terroir and know-how of cacao producers.
2. Facilitate communication and linkages between cacao producers and operators in the supply chain to promote market opportunities.
3. Increase the capacity of producing origins to recognise, value and preserve cacao quality and diversity.
4. Improve smallholder producers' livelihoods through increased market value of quality cacao.

Benefits for cacao producers through participation:

- Expert, detailed feedback on the physical and sensory quality of the submitted cacao samples.
- Invitation to a unique networking platform to meet potential buyers and promote superior quality cacao.
- Increased visibility by promoting and displaying the best samples at different events for potential buyers.
- International, regional and national recognition of cacao growers producing beans with exceptional quality and diverse flavours.
- Strengthened capacity to evaluate, identify and recognise excellent cacao.
- Incentive to develop cacao quality and flavour assessment skills at the national level.
- Official Award certificate, dedicated winner's profile webpage, dedicated social media posts, mention in press release, showcase at premier cacao and chocolate industry Cacao of Excellence ceremony event.



1.2 Process in brief

Deadline for submission of cacao bean samples: 31 January 2027

Registration Fee: 100 USD per sample

Registration fee includes:

- Cacao of Excellence evaluation process and admission in the 2027 Edition.
- A detailed Feedback Report including the analysis results from the physical evaluation, sensory evaluation of sample processed into cacao mass and for those part of the Best 50, sensory evaluation of sample processed into chocolate.

The Cacao of Excellence Awards is typically a 1.5 year long process that begins with the development of National Organisation Committees (NOCs) in cacao-producing origins – see next page for a visual representation of a full Edition. From the moment of its establishment, the NOC encourages producers in the origin to submit cacao bean samples and thereafter may conduct a National Competition to select and submit the best cacao bean samples, representative of the genetic diversity within their origin. Once established, the list of NOCs is announced and posted on the Cacao of Excellence website. **Producers interested in participating in the Cacao of Excellence Awards must contact their NOC for details on how to participate.**

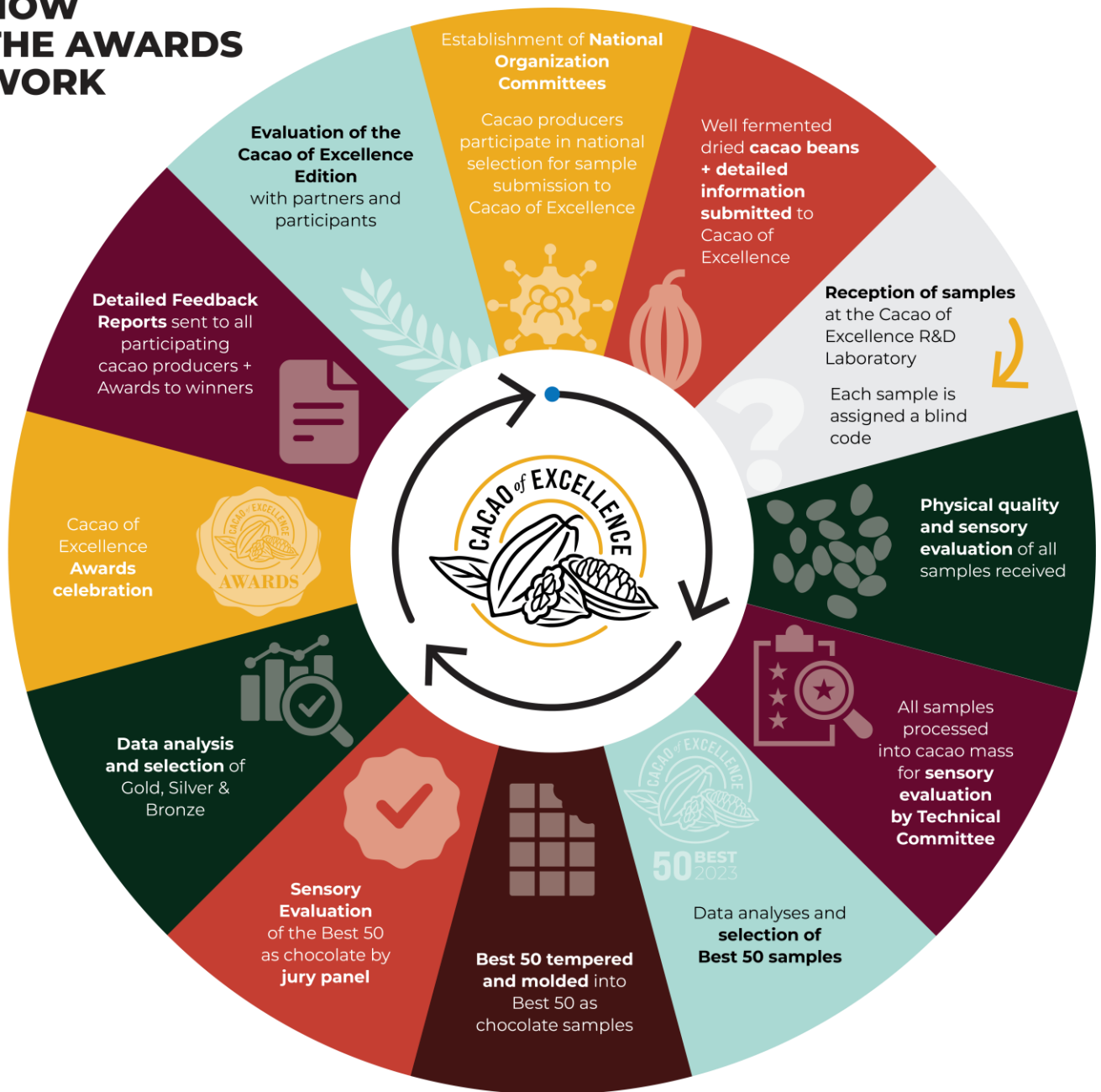
All cacao bean samples submitted are assigned a random code by Cacao of Excellence ensuring that the entire process is carried out blindly and that no information about origins or regions is communicated to those involved in the evaluation and to anyone before the Awards are celebrated. The samples go through a rigorous expert evaluation and selection process. All protocols for processing and evaluating the bean samples are based on the protocols and standards detailed in the [Guide for the Assessment of Cacao Quality and Flavour](#).

After a physical quality evaluation of whole and cut beans, including aromas, all accepted samples are roasted following precise protocols to best express the flavour potential of each cacao bean sample before being processed into cacao mass – also called cacao liquor. The cacao mass sensory evaluation is carried out by the [Cacao of Excellence Technical Committee](#), comprised of cacao and chocolate professionals and cacao sensory experts.

The blind evaluation results in the selection of the Best 50 samples to be announced and published on the Cacao of Excellence website. These Best 50 samples are then processed into a dark chocolate using a uniform recipe across samples and are subsequently evaluated blindly by a broader Jury of professionals, experts, chocolate makers and pastry chefs. The final results are then analysed to determine the Cacao of Excellence Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards winners. Gold, Silver and Bronze winners are celebrated at the 2027 Cacao of Excellence Awards Ceremony. A detailed technical Feedback Report on the physical and sensory evaluation of the beans is then sent to all participating producers.



HOW THE AWARDS WORK



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1.3 Calendar of activities

| Date | Activity |
|-------------------------------|--|
| June 2026 | The 2027 Edition of the Cacao of Excellence Awards is launched. Guide for Participation published: www.cacaoofexcellence.org |
| June to September 2026 | Cacao of Excellence communicates with all cacao-producing origins to establish the National Organisation Committees. |
| June to November 2026 | National Organisation Committees announce the 2027 Edition and encourage broad participation of producers. Producers interested in participating contact their National Organisation Committee for details of participation. Origins are encouraged to organise National Cacao of Excellence Competitions to select the best cacao bean samples representative of the genetic diversity within their origin. |
| November 2026 to January 2027 | National Organisation Committees send a minimum of 7 Kg of well fermented and dried beans with all required information and agreements for the use of each sample. |
| 31 January 2027 | Deadline for receiving: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All cacao bean samples and associated Excel Data Forms 2. Registration fees for each sample submitted 3. Agreement confirmed on the use of each sample. |
| November 2026 to June 2027 | All received samples are blind-coded by Cacao of Excellence. Physical quality evaluation is carried out including whole and cut beans aromas. Accepted samples are roasted following precise protocols to best express the flavour potential and are processed into cacao mass for sensory evaluation. |
| March to July 2027 | Cacao mass sensory evaluation is carried out blindly by sensory and cacao sector experts of the Cacao of Excellence Technical Committee. |
| September 2027 | The Best 50 samples are selected and nominated for the 2027 Cacao of Excellence Awards. Producers are notified. Names and contact details of the Best 50 producers are published on the website. |
| September to October 2027 | The Best 50 samples are processed into a dark chocolate (same recipe for all) for blind evaluation by the Cacao of Excellence Technical Committee and a Jury of industry professionals, including chocolate makers and sensory evaluation experts. |
| November to December 2027 | The results are analysed for the selection of the Gold, Silver and Bronze 2027 Cacao of Excellence Awards. |
| End 2027 | 2027 Cacao of Excellence Awards Ceremony and Gold, Silver and Bronze winners revealed - date and venue to be confirmed |
| End of Edition | Detailed Feedback Reports are sent to all participating producers, including results of the physical evaluation, sensory evaluation of the cacao mass and for the Best 50 samples, the sensory evaluation of the chocolate and the Cacao of Excellence 2027 Award certificates. |



2 Cacao of Excellence Coordination

The responsibilities of the coordination of the Awards by Cacao of Excellence are summarised below.

2.1 Coordination of international implementation

- Ensures that rules and regulations are applied, and that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained during the entire evaluation and nomination process.
- Establishes a Technical Committee comprised of a panel of international experts in sensory evaluation, responsible for the evaluation of each sample through a rigorous, transparent, and fair process.
- Advises on all technical processes including quality evaluation requirements and selects members of the Jury Panel for the evaluation of the Best 50 chocolate samples.

2.2 Reception and physical evaluation of the cacao bean samples

- Acknowledges receipt of submitted cacao bean samples.
- Assigns a blind code to each sample to ensure for a fair and unbiased evaluation and selection process.
- Conducts physical evaluations to ensure that key characteristics are within acceptable limits including an initial sensory evaluation (whole and cut beans) to determine the optimal roasting conditions that best express the flavour potential of each cacao bean sample, prior to processing into cacao mass.

2.3 Evaluation of the cacao bean samples as cacao mass and chocolate

- Processes all accepted samples into cacao mass for blind evaluation by the Technical Committee.
- Selects the Best 50 samples across the 4 cacao-producing regions of the world, based on the results of the Technical Committee's sensory evaluations of cacao mass samples.
- Informs the producers and publishes the list of the Best 50 on the Cacao of Excellence website, in media and across social media channels.
- Processes the Best 50 samples into dark chocolate for blind evaluation by the Cacao of Excellence Technical Committee and the Jury Panel.

2.4 Detailed Feedback Reports on each cacao sample

- Produces a detailed Feedback Report for each bean sample received and sends the report to each cacao producer at the end of the Edition.
- For the Best 50 samples, shares information on the sensory evaluation and contact details of the producer on a dedicated Cacao of Excellence producer webpage. Information on samples not selected for the Best 50 will remain confidential.
- Information on all cacao beans received is used for scientific analysis and reporting whilst ensuring anonymity.



3 National Organisation Committees

For each Award Edition, participating cacao-producing origins establish a National Organisation Committee that oversees the participation of cacao producers in their origin. National Organisation Committees should seek to include as many national stakeholders as possible, such as representatives of the following groups:

- National cacao boards
- Quality control centres
- Export promoting institutions
- Research and development institutions
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Cacao of Excellence confirms a National Organisation Committee in each origin, once roles and responsibilities have been agreed upon. National Organisation Committees play a crucial role in ensuring that superior quality samples, representative of the cacao diversity in the origin, are selected and sent to Cacao of Excellence. They are encouraged to organise a national Cacao of Excellence competition following the [guidelines for Cacao of Excellence National Competitions](#), available on the Cacao of Excellence website.

The responsibilities of the National Organisation Committees are summarised below.

3.1 National coordination

- Oversees the implementation of the Cacao of Excellence Awards process at the national level in an inclusive and participatory manner.
- Ensures that all interested parties participate and that all rules are observed and confidentiality is respected.
- Announces the Cacao of Excellence Awards and guidelines nationally and encourages cacao producers from different regions to participate, particularly producers who have not participated in previous Editions.
- Should not select samples from producers that are not eligible (see **section 4**), including producers who have already won a 2025 Cacao of Excellence **Gold** Award.
- Ensures that the national evaluation and selection of cacao samples is implemented under the guidance of experts in cacao quality and sensory evaluation.
- Stores cacao samples in optimum conditions during the selection process and secures a safety sample of 7 Kg.
- Ships the selected samples according to the maximum quota, to Cacao of Excellence between **November 1st 2026 and 31 January 2027**.

3.2 Reception of samples

- Receives samples from cacao producers and acknowledges receipt.
- Ensures that a minimum of 7 Kg of well-prepared, fermented, and dried beans is available for each sample and that an additional 7 Kg is kept for safety. **Samples of less than 7 Kg sent to Cacao of Excellence will be rejected.**
- Ensures that all producers understand the terms of use and grant permission to Cacao of Excellence for the use of the samples and associated data submitted (see **section 10**).
- Attributes a unique code to identify each sample sent to Cacao of Excellence.



3.3 Selection of samples

- Categorises samples as commercial or experimental. No more than 30% of samples per origin may be experimental.
- Ensures that only one sample per producer is selected.
- Ensures that all samples comply with the Cacao of Excellence Minimum Physical Quality Requirements (**section 7**).
- Evaluates and select the best samples that represent the cacao diversity of the origin.
- Ensures that no more than the quota of samples per origin is sent to Cacao of Excellence (**Annex A**). Cacao of Excellence will reject extra samples.

3.4 Registration and shipment of samples

- Ensures that the registration fee is paid for each bean sample submitted to Cacao of Excellence.
- Obtains a phytosanitary certificate from the authorities.
- Prepares and packages samples and accompanying documents following the sample preparation, packaging and documents instructions in **section 8**.
- Covers the cost of shipping the bean samples to Cacao of Excellence.
- Ensures that all bean samples are accompanied by the completed Excel Data Form, downloaded from www.cacaoofexcellence.org, with all information available on the sample and the producer (**section 6**).
- Ensures the accuracy of the information provided with each cacao bean sample.
- Sends the bean samples to Cacao of Excellence following the shipping instructions described in **section 8, as soon as November 1st 2026 and by 31 January 2027 at the latest.**

3.5 Safety duplication and storage of samples

- Ensures that a safety duplicate of 7 Kg of the same beans is in storage until the edition is completed. This is in case of damage, loss or any questions on bean quality.
- Stores samples received in adequate conditions from reception to shipment.

3.6 Follow-up with producers and national celebrations

- Ensures that all results are communicated to the participating producers.
- National Organisation Committees are encouraged to organise national celebrations for the producers of samples having won Cacao of Excellence Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards. In some origins, celebrations involve Ministries of Agriculture, National Cacao Boards and other organisations providing a public national recognition of achievement. NOCs are encouraged to produce press releases for news and media coverage.
- Ensures communication and linkages between cacao producers and operators in cacao supply chains to promote market opportunities.



4 Participating Cacao Producers

Cacao bean producers interested in participating should contact their National Organisation Committee. Contact information is published on the Cacao of Excellence website as soon as the National Organisation Committees are confirmed.

The selection and shipping of cacao bean samples to Cacao of Excellence is the responsibility of the National Organisation Committees.

Who can participate as a Cacao producer ?

Those considered “Cacao producers” are individuals, organisations and companies that are involved themselves or jointly in both cacao production and post-harvest processes – i.e. fermentation and drying. Organisations that can submit a sample as producers include:

- Individual producers
- Associations of producers
- Cooperatives
- Private estates
- National research centres

In cases where multiple actors are involved in the production and processing of the cacao sample – e.g. farmers of a community producing cacao pods and a company implementing fermentation and drying – all those involved in the resulting sample will be recognised in the official *Name of the producer* of the submitted sample. **An individual, organisation or company cannot submit a sample if they are only involved in the post-harvest process and cannot trace the origin of the cacao sample at the farm level.**

Please note that 2025 Cacao of Excellence Gold Award winners are not eligible to participate in the 2027 Edition.

The responsibilities of participating cacao producers are summarised below.

4.1 Sample submission conditions

- Ensure that only one cacao bean sample is submitted per producer.
- Ensure that the sample is not produced from any modified or artificial fermentations with addition of flavour material, fruit pulp or juices (**section 5**).
- Ensure that a 7 Kg safety duplicate of the sample submitted is stored by the National Organisation Committee until the edition is completed, in case of damage, loss or any questions on bean quality.
- Agree to the terms of use by Cacao of Excellence for the sample submitted.
- Securely package and clearly label the cacao bean sample.
- Submit their cacao bean sample and all associated documentation to the National Organisation Committee responsible for shipping the sample to Cacao of Excellence.



4.2 Associated information

- For the sample submitted, complete the Excel Data Form downloaded from www.cacaoofexcellence.org, with all information available on the sample and the producer (**section 6**).
- Ensure that direct contact details (address, email and phone number) of the producer are included for communication by email and phone.

4.3 Feedback on samples submitted

- Each participating producer receives a detailed Feedback Report from Cacao of Excellence at the end of the Edition (**section 9**).
- The feedback includes the results of the physical and sensory evaluation and in some cases recommendations for further improvement. This feedback is a critical part of the Cacao of Excellence process as it provides an opportunity for producers and National Organisation Committees to better understand the quality and uniqueness of the samples and in some cases improve quality.

5 Cacao Bean Sample Types and Requirements

Cacao of Excellence aims to recognise and empower a wide range of cacao producers globally. National Organisation Committees are therefore encouraged to select samples that are representative of the diversity of cacao and producers in the origin and submit samples of different genetic bean types, terroirs and/or prepared by using different post-harvest protocols.

5.1 Commercial and experimental

Cacao bean samples submitted to Cacao of Excellence can be of 2 categories:

- **Commercial Samples** – prepared by cacao producers from commercial farms or a group of farms, possible to reproduce the same quality cacao at commercial scale (several tons per year) in subsequent years.
- **Experimental Samples** – derived from interesting new varieties (newly selected varieties or materials with special quality traits) or through new post-harvest processes (e.g. novel fermentation method, etc.). These samples may not be available yet at commercial scale, but may become so within a few years' time. These samples may be prepared by cacao producers or by research institutes.



5.2 Samples per origin

For fairness and logistical reasons, Cacao of Excellence limits the total number of samples to be received by each origin based on a maximum quota listed in **Annex A**, based on the following criteria:

- **Basic quota** – 2024-2025 cacao production forecasts of the International Cocoa Organization (ICCO).
- **Additional samples** – one sample is added for origins who received an International Cocoa Award or a Cacao of Excellence Gold Award since the 2013 Edition, for a maximum of 2 samples.

5.3 Sample requirements

- Not more samples than the quota that has been defined for each origin.
- Not more than one sample per producer.
- No more than 30% of samples representing an origin as experimental.
- Samples should not be produced from any modified or artificial fermentations with addition of flavour material, fruit pulp or juices.
- If the above requirements are not respected, Cacao of Excellence will reject these samples.

6 Data and Photos for Each Cacao Bean Sample

6.1 Complete data on samples

A completed Excel Data Form is required for each sample, with all information available on the producer, origin, and mode of preparation of the beans. The data to be provided by producers and National Organisation Committees is described in **Annex B** and the Excel File can be downloaded on the Cacao of Excellence website: www.cacaoofoxcellence.org

Cacao bean producers are responsible for the accuracy and quality of the information provided with the samples to the National Organisation Committee, who are in turn responsible for ensuring that each sample is accompanied by its completed Excel Data Form. A key objective of Cacao of Excellence is to connect buyers with producers for mutually beneficial market opportunities. It is therefore critical that the producer shares their full contact details, including email address and mobile phone numbers. The accuracy of the data provided is also essential for determining conditions for the processing of the beans. The completed Excel Data Forms should be sent by e-mail to Cacao of Excellence and a printed copy for each sample should be included in the shipment.

IMPORTANT NOTIFICATION

Samples not accompanied with a completed Excel Data Form are not traceable and therefore will not be accepted.



Sample producers are welcome to send photos, including a brief description and source to be credited, of the following:

- Producers/cooperative representatives in the cacao farm
- Pods (both open and closed)
- Cut fresh beans
- Close ups of flowers
- Views of the cacao farm and forest area.

6.2 Use of the data on bean samples

The data captured through the data form is used for the following:

- Classify, evaluate and process the samples correctly with optimum roasting conditions.
- Connect producers with buyers in the cacao and chocolate industry and to promote the Best 50 samples and nominees as well as winners of Cacao of Excellence Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards by making publicly available the contact information and results of the evaluation and flavour profiles.
- Produce and send the Feedback Reports to each producer.
- Carry out scientific analysis while ensuring anonymity.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of Cacao of Excellence.

For optimum processing of cacao beans, the following information needs to be accurate:

- **Dominating genetics** – used to determine the roasting conditions, which are different for each type of cacao bean to bring out the full potential of flavours.
- **Planting material, farming practices and post-harvest practices** – used to develop individual Feedback Reports with recommendations to sample producers.
- **Production capacity** – makes it possible to assess and communicate the marketability and reproducibility of each sample.

7 Minimum Physical Quality Requirements

National Organisation Committees are responsible for evaluating and selecting the samples to be sent to Cacao of Excellence. All activities in cacao production, management and processing ultimately affect flavour development and bean quality.

Therefore, the cacao bean samples should be:

- Selected based on their superior quality and consistency.
- Harvested in the main harvesting season, as much as possible.
- Processed in a way to preserve and enhance their potential flavour development.
- Properly fermented, resulting in moderate bitterness and astringency and low percentages of slaty beans.
- Stored, packaged, and shipped in optimal conditions ensuring that the quality is maintained during transportation.

Cacao of Excellence's purpose is to recognise and celebrate the diversity of cacao and flavours around the world. For this purpose, samples from modified or artificial fermentations will not be accepted, i.e. samples where flavour material, fruit pulp or juices have been added to the fermentation.



Cacao of Excellence carries out a detailed physical quality evaluation of all received samples to ensure basic physical qualities and defects are all within acceptable limits. This information is provided to each producer in a detailed Feedback Report, at the end of the Edition.

7.1 Characteristics of the cacao beans samples

No ingredients should be added to the fermentation, such as flavour material, fruit pulp or juices.

An evaluation of whole beans and a cut test should be done for each bean sample and characteristics (qualities and defects) should be within the following internationally acceptable limits:

Whole beans

- Maximum 3% external mould.
- Maximum 3% with other defects: broken, insect-damaged, germinated, rotten or empty beans, etc.
- Properly dried with moisture content ideally between 6.5% and 7.5% and to a maximum of 8.5%.

Cut beans

- Maximum 3% slaty.
- Maximum 4% of internal mould.

The following are desirable characteristics:

- Absence of off-flavours, i.e. smoke, mould, earth, dirt or excessive acidity, bitterness and astringency.
- Absence of foreign matter and cacao residue, i.e. broken, flat, shrivelled and clumped beans or placenta, pod husk or shell fragments.
- Reasonably uniform in size.
- Bean count of 100 beans/100g or less is desirable, but not required.
- Stored for a minimum of 6 weeks after drying and before shipping to allow the flavour to stabilise prior to flavour testing.
- The colour of cut beans changes from fully purple (unfermented or partially fermented) to chocolate brown (fully fermented). The colour however can vary depending on the variety and genetics. Good fermentation contributes to the reduction of bitterness and astringency of cacao.

7.2 Preparation and storage

National Organisation Committees must ensure the following storage requirements are met for each bean sample to be sent to Cacao of Excellence:

- Remove damaged or empty beans and remaining placentas before bagging.
- Use clean and odour-free jute, cotton or nylon bags.
- Store the cacao bean samples in a cool room (20-22 °C), that is insect-free, with less than 70% relative humidity and no abnormal odours.



- Store each bean sample separately to avoid abnormal odours or infestation being transmitted from one sample to another.
- If necessary, fumigate under expert supervision and according to national requirements to eradicate insects.
- Store the beans for a minimum of 6 weeks after the date of drying and before shipping to allow the flavour to stabilise.

8 Registration, Documents, and Shipment of Samples

8.1 Payment of registration fee for each sample

The registration fee of 100 USD should be paid for each sample sent to Cacao of Excellence. The payment is managed by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, leader of the Cacao of Excellence programme. Payment should be made through the appropriate link below:

1 sample <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/QEU34KZ1>

2 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/QUJN9TGG>

3 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/QX6SK17W>

4 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/Q6E281CR>

5 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/QCI0E5LJ>

6 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/QQT7CPSJ>

7 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/QU5FOGCP>

8 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/Q8H35ODI>

9 samples <https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/Q3HCWC00>

If payment through this method is not possible, please contact Andrew Meter at a.meter@cgiar.org for alternative solutions.



8.2 Preparation of cacao bean samples for shipment

- Place each cacao bean sample in strong and well-sealed bags (recommended a double plastic bag), to avoid breakage and loss of beans during transport.
- Clearly label the bag of each bean sample with a unique ID code corresponding to the information in the printed and electronic Excel Data Form.
- Include a printed copy of the Excel Data Form in the bag of each sample to ensure correct identification.
- Place the bags of samples in rigid cardboard box to avoid loss or contamination between samples. Ensure a maximum of two samples per box.
- For each box/package, include a printed copy of the completed Checklist (**Annex C**).
- Send the completed Excel Data Form for each sample to Cacao of Excellence to Andrew Meter by email – a.meter@cgiar.org
- Send any photos by WeTransfer: www.wetransfer.com

8.3 Shipping instructions

- Ship the sample at the following address:
Cacao of Excellence (J.Butac)
Piazza Giacomo Matteotti 18 (Mercato Coperto)
c/o CittaDelCioccolato 2° Piano , sinistra c/o SEGRETERIA
06121 Perugia, Italy
Email: cacaoofexcellence@cgiar.org
Tel: +39 3200358225
- Clearly state the following on each box/package for the courier shipment (e.g. DHL, FedEx, UPS etc.) and shipping documents:
 - Package value of 5 USD - for customs, even if the package contains several samples.
 - Content: Samples of fermented and dried cacao beans without commercial value / for RESEARCH PURPOSE only.
 - NOTE: No EU phytosanitary import requirements for dried or fermented cacao beans
- If shipping more than one sample at a time, these should all be under the same courier shipment number. When the box/package is ready to be shipped, send the following information to Andrew Meter at Cacao of Excellence – a.meter@cgiar.org:
 - Name and contact details of the sender
 - Date of shipment
 - Name of courier
 - Courier's tracking number



IMPORTANT NOTES

- Please indicate all the information above to avoid import taxes and delays at customs that can affect the cacao bean quality if not stored in adequate conditions.
- **Do not put a value higher than 5 USD** for each box/package otherwise you will be asked to cover extra custom charges. Cacao of Excellence is not responsible for covering custom charges upon reception.
- Send the box/package with samples and accompanying documents as soon as **November 1st 2026** and **by 31 January 2027 at the latest**. Early submissions in November to December 2026 would be greatly appreciated to facilitate to organisation of processing and evaluation.
- Instruct the courier to deliver the shipment from:
- Monday to Friday from 10:00 to 17:00 Perugia time.
 - The office is closed on Saturdays and Sundays.
- If shipping more than one package at a time, these packages should all be under the same courier shipment number.

9 Evaluation, Selection, and Feedback

Upon reception, each cacao bean sample received by Cacao of Excellence is:

- Acknowledged with a confirmation email to the sender
- Attributed a blind code for identification and registered
- All associated documentation recorded

The blind code ensures that the sample remains anonymous throughout the evaluation and selection process until the celebrations of the Cacao of Excellence Awards.

9.1 Evaluation of the physical qualities

The physical characteristics of all received beans samples are evaluated to ensure that key characteristics are all within acceptable limits. The samples are evaluated first as whole beans including the aroma. Then a cut test is carried out and the beans characteristics recorded. The cut test aroma is evaluated and used to determine the optimal roasting conditions to optimise the flavour potential.

9.2 Evaluation of the cacao bean samples as mass

All accepted cacao samples are processed into cacao mass and evaluated (blindly) by the Technical Committee, a panel of international experts in cacao sensory evaluation, following the methodology outlined in the Guide for the Assessment of Cacao Quality and Flavour and using the Cacao of Excellence evaluation form, flavour wheel and glossary. The quantitative data is analysed statistically and the Best 50 samples representing the four cacao-producing regions ((1) Africa & the Indian Ocean, (2) Asia & the Pacific, (3) Central America & the Caribbean and (4) South America) are selected and nominated for Cacao of Excellence Gold, Silver or Bronze Awards.

NOTE – When the selection of the Best 50 samples is completed, Cacao of Excellence notifies all participating producers of the results. The name of the producers of the Best 50 samples is



published at this point without connecting them with the blind codes. The producers of these Best 50 samples are invited to send a series of short videos and photos presenting the sample producers and/or cooperatives in their cacao farms. These videos and photos are used for the Awards celebrations as well as for producer visibility and promotional purposes.

9.3 Evaluation of the Best 50 samples processed into chocolate

The Best 50 samples are processed into a dark chocolate with the same recipe (see below) and evaluated blindly by a members of the Technical Committee and a Jury Panel comprised of chocolate makers, bean buyers and experts in sensory evaluation.

| Standard chocolate recipe used by Cacao of Excellence | |
|--|--------------------|
| Ingredients | Composition |
| Cacao mass | 63 % |
| Sugar (sugar cane) | 30 % |
| Deodorised Cacao Butter | 7 % |
| Total | 100 % |
| Cacao content (cacao mass + cacao butter) | 70 % |
| <i>Ratio of cacao mass to sugar (cacao mass/sugar)</i> | <i>2:1</i> |
| <i>Fineness – particle size</i> | <i>14 - 18 µm</i> |

9.4 Selection of the 2027 Cacao of Excellence Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards

The quantitative sensory evaluation data is analysed to select the Cacao of Excellence Gold, Silver or Bronze Awards (honourable distinction, without money value) representing the four cacao-producing regions ((1) Africa & the Indian Ocean, (2) Asia & the Pacific, (3) Central America & the Caribbean and (4) South America). Once the winners are revealed at the 2027 Award Ceremony, the contact information of the producers and the flavour profile of the bean sample processed and evaluated as chocolate are made public on dedicated producer web pages of the Cacao of Excellence website. Information on samples not selected is kept confidential and shared only with the individual producers and in some cases the National Organisation Committees.

9.5 Feedback to cacao sample producers and National Organisation Committees

Following the Awards celebrations, individual and confidential Feedback Reports are sent to all participating producer. The report includes the results of the evaluation of the physical bean qualities, the cacao mass sensory evaluation and in the case of the Best 50, the chocolate sensory evaluation. The detailed feedback can be useful to producers when interacting with potential cacao bean buyers and chocolate makers. For samples with defects, recommendations for improvement may be provided when by members of the Technical Committee.



10 Use of cacao samples and associated data

By submitting cacao bean samples and associated data to the 2027 Edition of the Cacao of Excellence Awards, producers grant permission to Cacao of Excellence to use the samples and data as stated below.

In addition to their use for the purpose of evaluation and selection of the Best 50 and Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards, cacao samples submitted for the 2027 Edition of the Cacao of Excellence Awards may be used for other purposes by Cacao of Excellence.

The diversity of cacaos received at the Cacao of Excellence laboratory in the context of the Awards offers great opportunities for research and training on understanding and evaluating cacao quality and flavour. Whether in the form of unprocessed cacao beans, in the form of cacao mass or chocolate, samples submitted to Cacao of Excellence and their associated data (see **section 6**), along with data generated through their evaluation and selection (see **section 9**), can be used for:

- **Promotion of winning producers:** Cacao samples and associated data can be used to promote winning producers in various events, including the Awards ceremony, where Best 50 cacao samples in the form of chocolate may be presented to various audiences for tasting (free of charge) with the objective of promoting and celebrating winners and raising awareness on the diversity of cacao flavours produced around the world. For winning samples and producers, contact information and other associated data are shared publicly on dedicated webpages to promote the winners and link them to potential buyers.
- **Research purposes:** Cacao samples and associated data can be used for more fundamental research purposes. For instance, they can be used in research projects focused on cacao quality and flavour and their relationship with geographic origin, genetics, environment and climate context of production, post-harvest practices, or chemical and physical characteristics of cacao beans.
- **Developing training material:** Cacao samples and associated data can be used to develop training material, including cacao mass samples and their detailed flavour profiles. This training material can be used for the continuous training and calibration of the Cacao of Excellence Technical Committee and in the context of research and development projects for capacity building in the cacao sector – e.g. organisation of training sessions on cacao quality and flavour evaluation with producer organisations, within the context of a research and development project.
- **Cost recovery through the development of products:** Cacao samples and associated data can be used to develop products such as sensory evaluation training kits or chocolate boxes in the case of the Best 50 samples. The profits from the selling of products derived from cacao samples submitted to the 2027 Cacao of Excellence Awards participate in recovering the costs of running the Edition. The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT and its Cacao of Excellence programme do not make net profits from this commercial activity.



Annex A. Quotas of Cacao Bean Samples per Origin

Basic Quota Calculations

| ICCO 2024-2025 Production Forecast | Basic Quota |
|---|--------------------|
| More than 50,000 Mt | 7 |
| 5,000-49,999 Mt | 5 |
| 1,000-4,999 Mt | 4 |
| Less than 1,000 Mt | 3 |
| No ICCO data | 3 |
| ICA or Gold Award received since the 2013 Edition | Additional Samples |
| 1 | +1 |
| 2 or more | +2 |

Quotas of Cacao Bean Sample per Origin & Region

| Origin / Region | Basic quota | ICA 2013 | ICA 2015 | ICA 2017 | ICA 2019 | Gold 2021 | Gold 2023 | Gold 2025 | Additional Samples | 2027 Quota |
|------------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|------------|
| Africa and the Indian Ocean | | | | | | | | | Total: | 125 |
| 1. Angola | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 2. Benin | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 3. Cameroon | 7 | | | | | | 1 | | 1 | 8 |
| 4. Central African Republic | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 5. Congo, Rep. of | 5 | | | | | | | | | 5 |
| 6. Congo, Dem. Rep. of | 7 | | | | | | | | | 7 |
| 7. Côte d'Ivoire | 7 | 2 | 2 | | 1 | | | | 2 | 9 |
| 8. Equatorial Guinea | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 9. Gabon | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 10. Gambia | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 11. Ghana | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| 12. Guinea | 7 | | | | | | | | | 7 |
| 13. Kenya | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 14. La Réunion | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 15. Liberia | 5 | | | | | | | | | 5 |
| 16. Madagascar | 5 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 1 | | | 2 | 7 |
| 17. Mauritius | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 18. Nigeria | 7 | | | | | | | | | 7 |
| 19. Rwanda | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 20. Sao Tome and Principe | 4 | | | | | | | | | 4 |



| Origin / Region | Basic quota | ICA 2013 | ICA 2015 | ICA 2017 | ICA 2019 | Gold 2021 | Gold 2023 | Gold 2025 | Additional Samples | 2027 Quota |
|--|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|------------|
| 21. Sierra Leone | 5 | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | 6 |
| 22. Tanzania | 5 | | | 1 | 1 | | | | 2 | 7 |
| 23. Togo | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| 24. Uganda | 7 | | | | | | | | | 7 |
| 25. Zambia | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| Asia and the Pacific | | | | | | | | | Total : | 103 |
| 26. Australia | 3 | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | 4 |
| 27. Cambodia | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 28. China | 3 | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | 4 |
| 29. Fiji | 3 | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | 4 |
| 30. French Polynesia | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 31. Hawaii | 3 | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 32. India | 5 | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | 6 |
| 33. Indonesia | 7 | | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| 34. Laos | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 35. Malaysia | 3 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | 2 | 5 |
| 36. Myanmar | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 37. New Caledonia | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 38. Papua New Guinea | 5 | | 1 | | | | | | 1 | 6 |
| 39. Papua New Guinea – AROB | 3 | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | 4 |
| 40. Philippines | 5 | | | | 1 | 2 | | | 2 | 7 |
| 41. Samoa | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 42. Solomon Islands | 4 | | 1 | | | | | | 1 | 5 |
| 43. Sri Lanka | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 44. Taiwan | 3 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 2 | 5 |
| 45. Thailand | 3 | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| 46. Timor-Leste | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 47. Vanuatu | 4 | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| 48. Viet Nam | 4 | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 2 | 6 |
| Central America and the Caribbean | | | | | | | | | Total: | 98 |
| 49. Belize | 3 | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | 4 |
| 50. Costa Rica | 4 | 1 | | | | | 1 | | 2 | 6 |
| 51. Cuba | 4 | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| 52. Dominica | 4 | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | 5 |
| 53. Dominican Republic | 7 | 1 | | | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| 54. El Salvador | 3 | | | 1 | | | 1 | | 2 | 5 |
| 55. Grenada | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 56. Guadeloupe | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 57. Guatemala | 3 | | | 2 | | 1 | | | 2 | 5 |





| Origin / Region | Basic quota | ICA 2013 | ICA 2015 | ICA 2017 | ICA 2019 | Gold 2021 | Gold 2023 | Gold 2025 | Additional Samples | 2027 Quota |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|------------|
| 58. Haiti | 4 | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| 59. Honduras | 4 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | 2 | 6 |
| 60. Jamaica | 3 | | | | | | 1 | | 1 | 4 |
| 61. Martinique | 3 | | | 1 | | | 1 | | 2 | 5 |
| 62. Mexico | 5 | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | 6 |
| 63. Nicaragua | 5 | | 1 | | | | | | 1 | 6 |
| 64. Panama | 4 | | | | | | | | | 4 |
| 65. Puerto Rico | 3 | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| 66. Saint Kitts and Nevis | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 67. Saint Lucia | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 68. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | 3 | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | 4 |
| 69. Trinidad and Tobago | 3 | 1 | 2 | | 2 | | | | 2 | 5 |
| South America | | | | | | | | | Total: | 58 |
| 70. Bolivia | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| 71. Brazil | 7 | | | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 9 |
| 72. Colombia | 7 | | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | 9 |
| 73. Ecuador | 7 | | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 9 |
| 74. French Guiana | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 75. Guyana | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 76. Peru | 7 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | 2 | | 2 | 9 |
| 77. Suriname | 3 | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| 78. Venezuela | 5 | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 2 | 7 |
| | | | | | | | | | Total: | 384 |



Annex B. Example of the Excel Data Form for Each Sample

The Data Form can be downloaded on the Cacao of Excellence website:

www.cacaofexcellence.org

| Description of the data |
|--|
| A. Sample Information |
| Origin of the sample: |
| Sample number: Identification of the cacao bean sample by the producer or National Organisation Committee |
| Type of sample: <i>Commercial or Experimental?</i> |
| If experimental, what type of sample? <i>Accession in genebank, Local native variety, New processing method, Other</i> |
| If other type of experimental sample, please describe. |
| B. Sample Producer |
| Type of producer: <i>Individual producer, Producer association, Cooperative, Research station, Private estate, multi-actor or other</i> |
| Name and last name of the individual producer |
| Name of cooperative, association, Research station, Private estate or other |
| How many represented. How many men, how many women ? |
| Location of the farm or plantation: local/ street address, town, district, region |
| Location of the farm or plantation, GPS latitude coordinates (example, 10.1234): |
| Location of the farm or plantation, GPS longitude coordinates (example, -100.1234): |
| C. Contact details of the producer |
| The producer contact for the sample should be the producer themselves or an authorised contact. |
| Type of producer contact: <i>Individual producer of the sample, Representative of cooperative/ association etc., Producer's relative, Neighbour, Other</i> |
| Producer contact first and last name |
| Contact person email address and phone number |
| D. Sample Sender - Person responsible for submitting the sample to Cacao of Excellence |
| Date information sent (dd/mm/yyyy) |
| Sender first and last name |
| Sender email and phone number |
| Sender organisation |
| Comments on the sender |
| E. For samples that represent one producer: household and income sources |
| Size of the household - how many people are included in the household? How many men? How many women? |
| How many members of the household are involved in cacao production activities? |
| How many people are employed to work in cacao production activities? |
| Does the household have other income generating activities besides cacao production? <i>Which activities?</i> |
| What would be an approximate percentage of income derived from cacao production activity? |
| Are you part of a producer association or cooperative? Please provide the name |
| F. Description of the farm and agricultural practices |
| Size of the farm from which the sample was obtained, in hectares (ha) |



Description of the data

Plot(s) number on the farm represented by the sample (if available)
Density of cacao trees on the farm where the sample came from (trees/ha)
Productivity of the farm where the sample came from (Kg dried beans/ha/year)
If commercial sample, what is the quantity of beans (tonnes/year) of the same origin that can be reproduced with similar quality in following years?
Average age of the trees from which the sample was obtained (years)
Start and end of the dry season (month of the year)
Start and end of the main harvesting period (month of the year)
Type of farming practices: *Traditional management, Intensive plantation, Agroforestry system, Other*
Type of certification: *None, Certified organic, Rainforest Alliance, UTZ, Fairtrade, Others*
Use of fertilizer? If yes please specify
Use of pesticides? If yes please specify what products
Use of permanent shade trees? If yes, name of dominant shade tree species.

G. Genetic origin of the sample and propagation technics

Local name(s) of cacao variety
Dominating genetic origin of variety: *Criollo, Trinitario, Forastero, Nacional, Other type*
If a cross, what are the names of the parents (mother x father)?
If experimental sample, describe the genetic origin.
Type of tree propagation technique mainly used: *Seed, Graft, Other*
If grafted, what is the rootstock (if known)?
If grafted, what type of grafting is used: *Top graft, Patch bud graft, Graft on mature tree, Other*

H. Information on the fermentation process and timing for the sample

When was the fermentation started for this sample? (dd/mm/yyyy)
Where was the sample fermented? *On-farm, At Cooperative or association post-harvest center, On experimental station, Other*
Time between harvest and pod breaking (in days)
Pre-drying of wet beans before fermentation? *Yes / No*
Weight of cacao sample collected for fermentation (Kg wet beans)
Duration of fermentation (days)
Fermentation carried out in: *Wooden boxes, Heaps, In bags, Other*
Estimated weight of fermentation mass in 1 box, heap or bag (Kg wet beans).
Number of turns during fermentation
Number of days after fermentation started when beans were turned (days)
Were any aromatic materials, fruit pulp or juice added? *Yes / No*
Note that samples from modified or artificial fermentations with addition of flavour material, fruit pulp or juices are not accepted.
EXPERIMENTAL SAMPLE ONLY - If micro-fermentation was done: weight of wet beans in netted bags placed in a fermentation mass (Kg wet beans)
EXPERIMENTAL SAMPLE ONLY - If micro-fermentation: weight of total cacao mass (Kg wet beans)
Fermentation method: The method described is how it is usually done in the region? If not, what is the main difference?

I. Information on the drying process and timing for the sample

When was the drying of the sample initiated? (dd/mm/yyyy)
Where was the sample dried? *On-farm, At Cooperative or association post-harvest center, On experimental station, Other*
Drying method(s) applied to this sample:
Direct sun drying - *Yes / No*



Description of the data

Indirect sun drying (e.g. ventilated tunnel, greenhouse type) - *Yes / No*

Artificial drying (or "mechanical" or "forced" drying) - *Yes / No*

If use of a combination of drying methods is used, please specify

Provide details below on the relevant drying method(s) used for the bean sample.

Direct sun drying: Duration of direct sun drying process (days)

Direct sun drying: What type of surface was the sample dried on? *Side of road/asphalt, Cement Floor, Wood, Bamboo, Metal, Other*

Direct sun drying: If other type of surface, please specify

Direct sun drying: Thickness of bean layer on the drying surface (cm)

Indirect sun drying: Duration of indirect sun drying (days)?

Indirect sun drying: What type of surface was the sample dried on? *Cement Floor, Wood, Bamboo, Metal, Other*

Indirect sun drying: If other, please specify

Indirect sun drying: Thickness of bean layer on the drying surface (cm)

Indirect sun drying: Please describe the construction of the solar dryer.

Artificial drying ("mechanical" or "forced"): Duration of artificial drying (days)?

Artificial drying: Thickness of the bean layer (cm)

Artificial drying: Type of dryer used: *Tray and fire, Samoa type, Other*

Artificial drying: If other type of drier, which?

Artificial drying: Source of heat used: *Wood, Waste, Gas, Fuel, Others*

Artificial drying: If other sources of heat used, please specify

Duration of total drying process (days), calculated from answers above

Drying method(s): The method described is how it is usually done in the region? If not, what is the main difference?

J. Physical quality evaluation of the bean samples and storage

Has a cut test been done? *Yes / No*

If yes provide the % of:

- slaty beans
- violet beans/not fermented
- violet-brown beans/semi-fermented
- brown beans

Moisture content of beans (%)

Temperature and relative humidity of sample storage's place (degrees Celsius °C)

Any pest control carried out during storage? *Yes / No*

K. Other comments

Add any comments on sample if needed



Annex C. Check List to be Included with Samples

Each cacao bean sample shipment/package should be accompanied by the verified Checklist below to ensure that all requirements are met. The Checklist can be downloaded on the Cacao of Excellence website: www.cacaofexcellence.org

| Requirements for accepting samples | (v) |
|--|-----|
| Eligibility of samples | |
| 1. All samples are a minimum of 7 Kg of fermented and dried cacao beans. | |
| 2. A safety duplicate sample of 7 Kg is stored and available until the end of the Edition. | |
| 3. No samples are prepared by modified or artificial fermentations, i.e., flavour material, fruit pulp or juices added to the fermentation. | |
| 4. No more than 1 sample per producer is submitted. | |
| 5. No samples are submitted by previous winners of a Cacao of Excellence Gold Award in 2025. | |
| 6. The number of samples submitted does not exceed the quota allocated to the samples' origin. | |
| 7. No more than 30% of the total number of samples are experimental. | |
| 8. All bean samples comply with the Minimum Physical Quality Requirements and Selection Criteria. | |
| 9. Registration fees of 100 USD were paid following instructions. | |
| Documents and shipping | |
| 10. Samples are prepared and shipped following the instructions in section 8 of the Guide for Participation. | |
| 11. A symbolic package value of maximum 5 USD for customs is indicated, even if the package contains several samples. | |
| 12. The contents indicated are samples of fermented and dried cacao beans without commercial value / for research purpose only. | |
| 13. All required information about the samples is completed in the Excel Data Form. | |
| 14. A completed Excel Data Form for each sample is sent via email to Andrew Meter (a.meter@cgiar.org) | |
| 15. A printed copy of the completed Excel Data Form is enclosed in the shipment for each sample. | |
| 16. The courier is informed that reception of samples at the Cacao of Excellence Lab in Perugia, Italy is restricted to Mondays to Fridays from 10:00 to 17:00 Perugia time. | |
| 17. An email has been sent to Andrew Meter (a.meter@cgiar.org), with the following information: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Name and contact details of the sender Date of shipment Name of courier Courier's tracking number Completed Excel Data Form for each sample | |
| 18. This Checklist is enclosed in the package(s) containing the samples. | |

